DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 283 321 EC 192 750

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TITLE Gifted Education Policy Issues for the 1990's.
PUB DATE [86]
NOTE 6p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Board of Education Policy; *Educational Planning; *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Financial Support; *Gifted; Identification; Professional Development; *Program Development; School Districts; Staff Development; State School District Relationship; Student Placement

ABSTRACT

Six policy issues emerging from a Midwest dissemination conference on the Richardson Study are highlighted. The focus is on facilitating policy initiatives in gifted education among local and state school districts. Policy statements on each of the following issues are cited: improving identification procedures; articulating goals, programs, and services in a comprehensive program development; teacher training and staff development; utilization of outside resources; priority for and continuity of funding; and curriculum flexibility (student placement). (JW)

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GIFTED EDUCATION POLICY ISSUES FOR THE 1990'S

As the 1990's approach, it is important that educators of the gifted begin to shift their perspective from advocacy efforts to policy initiatives, particularly in local districts and states that have had programs in place for several years. As we begin to examine policy issues, it may be useful to use our most current research efforts to frame such work. The Richardson Study provides a good basis for such delineation. Toward that end, the Center for Talent Development at Northwestern University hosted a dissemination conference on the Richardson Study and its implications for program planning and development. A cadre of leading educators and foundation representatives from a ten state region were invited to discuss the study. Approximately 50 individuals representing education and foundations met over the three day period.

The Richardson Study has the potential to impact strongly on local and state school district efforts across the country for the following reasons:

a) It can serve as a catalyst for dissemination of the findings and resultant models from the study through special publications as well as special seminars sponsored on an ongoing basis with school districts. (Copies of the monograph from the Richardson Dissemination Conference held in Lake Bluff are available for the cost of mailing from CTD).

b) School districts across the country are ready to move on recommendations for quality programs. Many sates have received substantial increases in funding for their gifted programs from their state legislatures and are faced with gearing up forspecialized programs.

c) Other than the Richardson Study, there are very few data that could provide a focus or direction for local planning efforts at a level of specificity so needed by local educators. The focus on the pyramid model is especially useful for many school districts that have been dissatisfied with pull-out programs but who were incapable of transcending that model without seeing viable alternatives.

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The focus of the partnership efforts of the conference was to evolve relevant policy issues from the study's recommendations that might serve as a framework for policy agendas in gifted education for the 1990's and beyond. Targeted groups for disseminating these policy agendas were local and state boards of education as well as higher education groups. The assembled groups heard presentations on the implications of the study for program development for able learners and the partnership role of foundations and corporations in the process. A panel of educators representing local, state, and university perspectives provided the focus and direction for policy deliberations by delineating critical study findings. Later presentations on research and evaluation rounded out the information sessions.

Small task force groups addressed one of six policy issues in order to come up with a consensus on a policy statement. A creative problem-solving model was employed to guide the groups in their work. Below are highlighted the six policy issues and the finalized statement that each group issued.

Midwest Policy Initiatives in Gifted Education
(based on The Richardson Study)

Policy Issue #1 "Casting a wider net" in identification procedures
Statement of Policy

There are students with exceptional levels of ability whose needs are not being met by existing regular educational programs or special services for the gifted. These students are being excluded because of the existing definitions and identification procedures of gifted programs.

Policy Issue #2 Comprehensive Program Development
Statement of Policy

1. *School districts need to have a philosophical statement on CPD that articulates goals, programs, and services for able learners. This statement needs to be formally adopted by the appropriate governing group and widely disseminated and communicated,*

2. *CPD should be "infused" into a multi-year implementation schedule with areas of responsibility carefully delineated,*

3. *CPD implies defining the school role at several levels: direct service providers, facilitators, and linkers to non-school resources,*

4. *CPD should be developed in such a way that definition/assessment/program/service provisions are appropriately matched,*

5. *CPD implies developing a broad-based comprehensive talent-find mechanism that embraces recognized concepts of talent such as Gardner's multiple intelligences, Sternberg's triarchic theory, or the Department of Education definition.*

Policy Issue #3 Teacher Training and Staff Development
Statement of Policy

In order to provide the best possible educational experiences for gifted children, persons involved with them should be engaged in training programs at the awareness through skill development levels based on their rates and levels of expertise. This would include providing information on gifted students to all preservice candidates. Training should reflect research on effective models and practices and be conducted through collaborative effort between agencies and groups which have an impact on the education of the gifted. If needed, legislative and judicial remedies should be pursued.

Policy Issue #4 Utilization of Outside Resources
Statement of Policy

Able learners exhibit a wide range of special and specific educational needs. The assumption that the local school can adequately meet all the needs of its student constituency, especially in light of declining tax revenues, is inherently limited. Therefore, the infusion of external resources is a vital and necessary adjunct to the educational experiences provided by the local school for its able learners.

Policy Issue #5 Funding
Statement of Policy

The local district must assume the responsibility for a free and appropriate education of high quality for students of all abilities. Providing well managed, comprehensive programs for able learners requires priority and continuity of funding by those responsible parties. Excess costs related to the special needs of gifted students should be provided as an on-going function of state and federal agencies. Special initiatives can be supported by short-term grants from foundations, corporations, government agencies, and community resources.

Policy #6 Curriculum Flexibility
Statement of Policy

All students should be placed in the curriculum according to demonstrated competence. For able and slow learners, special attention should be given to out-of-grade placements.

The focus of our center at Northwestern on identifying and serving academically talented learners at all stages of development according to the nature and degree of their giftedness merges very well with the findings of the Richardson Study. As we provide technical assistance across our region and beyond, the policies that have evolved from the study recommendations will prove to be invaluable.